



Early Journal Content on JSTOR, Free to Anyone in the World

This article is one of nearly 500,000 scholarly works digitized and made freely available to everyone in the world by JSTOR.

Known as the Early Journal Content, this set of works include research articles, news, letters, and other writings published in more than 200 of the oldest leading academic journals. The works date from the mid-seventeenth to the early twentieth centuries.

We encourage people to read and share the Early Journal Content openly and to tell others that this resource exists. People may post this content online or redistribute in any way for non-commercial purposes.

Read more about Early Journal Content at <http://about.jstor.org/participate-jstor/individuals/early-journal-content>.

JSTOR is a digital library of academic journals, books, and primary source objects. JSTOR helps people discover, use, and build upon a wide range of content through a powerful research and teaching platform, and preserves this content for future generations. JSTOR is part of ITHAKA, a not-for-profit organization that also includes Ithaka S+R and Portico. For more information about JSTOR, please contact support@jstor.org.

COMMUNICATION

TO THE MANAGING EDITOR OF THE AMERICAN HISTORICAL REVIEW:

Dear Sir:

WITH reference to the notice of my *Prolegomena to History* in the April number, may I call attention to the fact that the comments of Professor Fling are just a dogmatic reiteration of certain pronouncements in regard to history which he took over some fourteen or fifteen years ago from the German philosopher Heinrich Rickert, and that, so far is he from addressing himself to the topic in hand, no one could discover from his remarks that the argument he now presents again had been fully considered in my publication.

The formula which Professor Fling has adopted necessitates the setting up of an opposition between "science" and "natural science", and hence he has ignored the section in which I point out that, while everyone to-day uses the word "science" in a sense to suit himself, there is a well-defined "method of science" which may be applied to any subject-matter whatsoever. It is, therefore, immaterial whether Professor Fling and Herr Rickert desire to apply the term "science" to a form of literature like historiography; what does matter is that the method of science has not been applied to the subject-matter which historiography utilizes in one particular way. The point is that Professor Fling is in the position of maintaining that the historical student is, for some unassigned reason, to be debarred from utilizing the results of historical investigation for any other purpose than the construction of a "unique synthesis".

Now, it is of the highest importance that the historical student should come to realize what this programme involves. There can be no possible objection to the maintenance of the tradition of history-writing, but it is high time we began to understand the kind of basis upon which historiography rests. Professor Fling in adopting Rickert's argument is simply using the weapon that lies to his hand in order to defend the traditional practice of historians, but he has not taken the trouble to see where his argument leads.

The methodological principle adopted by the historian is that his aim would be accomplished by stating what it was that had happened *in the form of narrative*. As a mode of explanation, however, narrative is unsatisfactory, for it can be carried out only by the selection, from among the many happenings that might be included, of such events as appear to be of importance to a particular individual at a particular time. This defect has long been recognized by the open admission that history must continually be rewritten, not so much because of the discovery of new facts, but because of the attainment in successive generations of new points of view. And here is the crux of the methodological problem for the historian: selection of facts for presentation can be made only in the light of some personal interest or general idea. Selection implies a theory of value, a basis for estimating the relative importance of events.

The most obvious basis of selection is the interest excited in the mind of the historian by the outcome of a specific series of happenings, more particularly when this takes what we speak of as a dramatic form. Nevertheless, this dramatic unity is essentially episodic, for it cannot be made applicable to history as a whole. Hence men have been driven, in the effort to create a synthesis of human events, to formulate, consciously or unconsciously, some abstract idea as to the meaning or significance of the course of history. In recent times, the most usual form of this activity has been the attempt to define the "law" or principle of "progress".

Now, such attempts to formulate a "philosophy of history" are, necessarily, based upon the presupposition that all human history constitutes a unity, that all human events may be regarded as a single, unique sequence of happenings. And the mutual dependence of the two is aptly illustrated in Professor Fling's contention that *history is the unique synthesis of human evolution*. Without postulating some philosophical principle by which unity is introduced into history, it is useless to speak of a unique sequence of events; the synthesis is entirely dependent upon the informing idea. The simple fact is that we are not presented in experience with one history, but with many. The histories of Japan, China, Turkestan, Russia, Germany, France, England, are unique, and cannot be reduced to one save by the imposition of some vague hypothesis such as that of "social evolution".

There are many histories, and this manifoldness reveals our task as historical students if we can overcome our predilection for the method of philosophy and adopt the method of science. That task is, not the writing of narratives based upon some undefined philosophy of history, but the comparison of these several histories with the object of ascertaining the elements which they exhibit in common.

In conclusion, may I say that, whether as students or as men, we cannot escape the appeal of the world-situation of to-day. Amid the turmoil, the fact stands out with painful clarity that after all the energy that has been expended upon the study of human affairs we know less about man than about any other phenomenon of nature. The question comes very close to us at the present moment whether, instead of utilizing the facts of history to construct narratives ever to be rewritten, we may not utilize these same facts to elicit scientific knowledge. What of?—of the way in which man everywhere has come to be as he is; a problem which can be dealt with only through the study of history. Is it improper for us as historical students to endeavor to contribute in some degree to the welfare of humanity? Let us remember that Darwin's imperfect analysis of the processes of biological evolution revolutionized, within a few years, our ideas of nature. Is it too daring a suggestion that the historian, through the application to his own materials of the method of science, might similarly aid in throwing light upon the obstacles and difficulties that now lie in the path of mankind?

FREDERICK J. TEGGART.